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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, January 31, 1934.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Mrs. Roosevelt and the School Lunch Program." Information approved by the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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The First Lady of the Land went to school one day this month. She wanted to see for herself just what the public school children of Washington have for lunch.

With two friends, Mrs. Roosevelt drove up to the Dennison Vocational school in her blue roadster, and ate a luncheon prepared by girl students. It was a good lunch, too. Mrs. Roosevelt said so. In fact, she was enthusiastic about the food, and about the way it was served. The First Lady ate fruit cocktail, chicken pattie and vegetables, and ice cream. There were lace covers on the table, green candlesticks, and place cards.

The next school Mrs. Roosevelt visited was the Morgan colored school. She arrived in time to see the children of families on the relief list eating a substantial mid-day free luncheon, and then drove away to visit still another school, where the children were also at lunch. All these meals are part of the free-lunch program inaugurated recently in Washington for children whose parents cannot afford to serve a noon meal at home.

Mrs. Roosevelt stopped at the junior and senior high schools, too, where the students were eating meat balls and gravy, tomatoes, vegetables, peanut rolls, oranges, and milk. All the children who eat in the cafeterias receive tickets, so there's not a chance of any child knowing which ones of his classmates receive free meals.

After visiting all these schools in Washington, and eating lunch at one of them, Mrs. Roosevelt had to hurry home to the White House and entertain the wives of the Cabinet members at another luncheon. Reports are that she ate very little at the second meal.

I ~~have an idea~~ that her guests were glad to get a first-hand account of the free-lunch project, for feeding undernourished children is a serious problem these days. Grace Abbott, Chief of the Children's Bureau of the U. S. Department of Labor, says there is evidence that malnutrition was increasing during the past six years. Six million children were living on relief, and some of them had been on the relief list for four years -- "a very long time in the life of a child."

Twenty years ago, says Katherine Amend, a Washington writer, when anybody asked the question, "What are little girls made of?" the romantics answered, "Sugar and spice and everything nice." Which is a pretty sentiment, but it doesn't get us anywhere in a practical way.

Today, says this same writer, the answer is different, and she quotes the directions, "To make one child: Give daily one quart of milk, three tablespoons of cod-liver oil, three or four fruits and vegetables a day. Fill in the cracks with plenty of cereals, bread, eggs, and other energy foods."

Now, to get back to the school lunch. Of course, a nourishing lunch is important for every child. But it is so very important for the child who does not get enough to eat at home. It is a way of insuring him one-third of the food he needs during the day.

Many childhood ills, and many physical handicaps which don't show up until later life, are traced to improper nourishment during school days. We all know what children will do, in the matter of eating, if left to themselves. With no one to guide their food habits, they're very likely to eat a poor breakfast, or none at all, dash off to school, do very unsatisfactory school work, and eat most of their carried lunch at the first recess. At noon they hurry through an inadequate lunch. When they get home from school they are so hungry that they eat an enormous lunch which includes pie, cake, or cookies. Naturally, when supper time comes they can't eat the simple essential foods that they need. There's more lunching later in the evening, and so to bed. Such a program, say the child health specialists, is disastrous to health, growth, and development.

Nowadays, in the best regulated schools, a grown person eats lunch with the youngsters. She encourages them to eat slowly, and incidentally to eat in a way that is socially acceptable. They talk about pleasant things, and make the lunch period a happy and cheerful occasion.

There are various ways of financing school lunches. A Home Demonstration club of a certain Southern state started a school lunch project some months ago. The president of the club suggested that the members buy a steam pressure canner and set it up, for the community's use, at school. There were two good ideas behind the purchase of this canner -- to encourage every family to put up food for the winter, and to supply the school pantry with hot-lunch material. Each person who used the pressure canner contributed one can out of each ten that she filled. Before long there were two hundred cans of food in the school pantry -- a nice assortment of beans, butterbeans, tomatoes, corn, and soup mixtures.

Later on the club members and the school-lunch authorities bought a beef animal. They canned the meat, so that the children might have meat loaf, hash, broth, and other nourishing dishes throughout the winter. The school lunches in this particular community were furnished for two cents each, including muffins, whole wheat toast, or home made rolls.

"But we didn't stop there," said the nutritionist in charge. "As a result of the help from the women's club, the underprivileged school children are given their lunches free, every day. It is truly a picture," she says, "to see the sixty-five children pass into the lunch room every day, take their seats at the tables, and wait in an orderly manner while they are served a hot lunch, out of the lovely old English rose bowls which were donated by the club president. Each child presents a ticket for lunch; therefore, no child knows which ones are receiving their lunches free."

Tomorrow: "Kitchen Get-Togethers for Efficiency."